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Walsh Inquiry Widens, Names Official of CIA

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WASHINGTON—Prosecutors in the Iran-Contra investigation, widening their inquiry to include officials still working at the CIA, have notified a senior agency official involved in Latin American affairs that he is the subject of a criminal investigation. The Times learned Thursday.

CIA officials consistently have denied that there was a broad agency role in secret efforts by former National Security Council aide Oliver L. North to support the Nicaraguan rebels.

But the notification, issued to Alan D. Fiers, chief of the CIA's Central America task force, means that prosecutors have found evidence indicating Fiers was involved in conduct that "is within the scope" of a grand jury investigating the Iran-Contra scandal.

He is not now a target for criminal indictment, however, government sources said.

Justice Department regulations require prosecutors to operate under a system of technical rules

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defining the status of individuals who are involved in criminal inquiries at each stage of an inquiry. Under these rules, a "subject of an investigation" is someone whose conduct will be examined by the grand jury.

A person who is described as a "subject" may—and often does—become a "target." A target is defined as someone "to whom the prosecutor or the grand jury has substantial evidence linking him/her to the commission of a crime and who, in the judgment of the prosecutor, is a putative defendant."

The notification was given within the last week when Fiers insisted on knowing his "status," before

submitting to questioning by attorneys on the staff of independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh, according to the sources, who refused to be identified.

A CIA spokesman declined comment, and Fiers' attorney, Anthony A. Lapham, a former CIA general counsel, did not return a reporter's calls. But it was learned that Fiers is continuing to occupy his sensitive CIA post, in which he manages the agency's clandestine support to the rebels and other covert Central America operations.

CIA Director William H. Webster has said that he will not decide whether to remove or discipline agency officials tied to the Iran-Contra affair until after House and Senate panels deliver their joint report on the scandal and a specially appointed CIA counsel, Russell Broemmer, finishes his review of the matter.

Panel's Report Due Nov. 17

The House and Senate report is tentatively scheduled for release on Nov. 17. And Broemmer's internal review should be delivered to Webster about 10 days later, one source said.

Fiers is one of a half-dozen CIA agents and executives in the agency's Washington headquarters who have been tied publicly to North's secret efforts to supply arms to the rebels during a period when Congress had prohibited U.S. government involvement with military assistance to the anti-Sandinista

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forces.

At least two lower-ranking officials have taken paid leaves of absence until investigators determine the extent of their roles.

When the scandal first broke a year ago, CIA officials denied any illegal activities by agency employees. But in recent months they have shifted their stance, saying that the agency's culpability will be determined by outside investigators. Privately, CIA officials maintain that only a handful of employees may have violated agency policy or the law in their activities with North.

Beyond Key Figures

The notification to Fiers is the clearest indication to date that Walsh's investigation has spread beyond the well-publicized activities of North and his private associates to include the CIA's secret role

in arms shipments to Iran and the Contras.

Fiers, who supervised CIA contact with the rebels at the same time that North and his aides secretly sold arms to them, becomes the first senior CIA official whose activities are under criminal investigation since Edwin P. Wilson, a retired intelligence agent who was convicted of selling explosives to Libya and providing training for Libyan terrorists.

Fiers, 48, is a 20-year veteran of the CIA's clandestine service. He took over the agency's Central America Task Force in October, 1984, days before Congress amended a budget resolution to ban all U.S. military aid to the Contras, except that specifically authorized by the lawmakers themselves.

In an arrangement unique to the post he held, Fiers reported not

only to his superiors in the agency's Latin America division but also directly to the agency's top covert operations officials and to the late CIA director William J. Casey.

Until the congressional ban on Contra aid, the task force had played a central role in the guerrilla war inside Nicaragua, coordinating a CIA-run program of military assistance, training, political support and intelligence advice to the rebels.

That program was sharply curtailed in the months after Fiers took his post, but as he testified in August to Congress' Iran-Contra panels, it never entirely ceased.

In his testimony, since declassified, Fiers admitted that he allowed CIA officers in Central America to aid direct weapons deliveries to the Contras inside Nicaragua during the period of the outright ban on aid.

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